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Mrs Elizabeth Haynes
Headteacher
Oakmere Primary School
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Dear Mrs Haynes

Short inspection of Oakmere Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 23 May 2017, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection findings. The visit was the first short inspection carried out since the school was judged to be good in February 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection.

Visitors to Oakmere Primary School are warmly welcomed, and quickly notice the school's positive climate and the way in which all staff, governors and pupils work hard in order to live by the school's values of 'friendship, respect, opportunity and self-discipline'. Staff are very caring and are united in setting high expectations. As a result, pupils behave impeccably, are taught well and enjoy their education. Across the school, different groups of pupils are making good progress and demonstrate positive attitudes towards working hard and achieving well.

In my meetings with them and during my visits to lessons, pupils were proud of their school and their achievements. They enjoy positive relationships with staff and appreciate the quality of teaching they now receive. Pupils of all backgrounds and abilities agreed that teaching activities have become more demanding, and they are being helped to do their best. They also enjoy the range of clubs and sporting activities which the school offers them.

Oakmere Primary School is highly regarded by parents and this is reflected in their overwhelmingly positive comments on Parent View (Ofsted's online questionnaire). Parents who responded were fulsome in their support for the school's work to keep their children safe, happy, well taught and cared for. They also expressed their high approval of you and your staff and most respondents said that they would

recommend the school to other parents. Parents are confident in the school's work and the friendly, approachable way in which staff respond to any concerns. Other parents approached me to report that their decision to send their children to the school was the 'best we have made'. Parents also gave their strong approval for the help offered to them, in order to support their children to learn at home, particularly with mathematics and reading.

Your school is inclusive. Many pupils join at times other than the start of the year, or may have missed part of their schooling. Around one-fifth of your pupils join the school in the early stages of learning English. You meet this challenge by removing the barriers this presents so that pupils quickly become part of the school community and can make good progress. Your staff go out of their way to ensure that these pupils are welcomed, settle quickly and participate fully in school life.

You have successfully addressed the areas to improve from the last inspection. One area was the improvement of pupils' written skills across the different subjects of the curriculum. Pupils' writing skills are now strong. You have also brought about clear improvements to the quality of teachers' questioning skills. As a result, pupils of all abilities, including the most able, are provided with a higher level of challenge when their teachers explain new knowledge or discuss their work with them. Consequently, they develop a deeper understanding in different subjects. A third area for improvement was to address the attendance and punctuality of pupils. Your determined action with parents has led to a steady reduction in absence and lateness for all groups of pupils, including those known to be disadvantaged.

Governors have a clear understanding of where they want the school to be and have confidence in your leadership. You have taken effective advice from the local authority advisory service and worked with a national leader in education in order to learn from the strengths in their school. However, you have developed the quality of leadership in the school without becoming dependent on external help and this is a further indication of the school's capacity for improvement.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders fulfil their statutory duties with care and attention. Pupils feel safe and all staff and governors are appropriately trained in ensuring that pupils are kept safe, using the latest government advice. Staff are fully aware of what to do and whom to tell when a concern is raised and pupils told me that they are totally confident in the school's ability to help them should they have a problem they need to share. Pupils also reported that bullying is swiftly addressed on the very rare occasions it happens. Records show that staff are vigilant and quickly report any concerns to leaders, who act upon them quickly.

Checks on the suitability of staff to work with children are meticulous and recruitment arrangements are also safe. Work to support the most vulnerable pupils is effective. This includes swift and efficient communication with external bodies and accurate record-keeping. In this way, all leaders are aware of any changes and act upon them to help pupils. Attendance, which has been below the national average

in 2015 and 2016, is now improving. You carefully focus attention on helping particularly vulnerable pupils to attend, including the disadvantaged and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.

Inspection findings

- To ascertain that the school remained good, one of my key lines of enquiry was about pupils' achievement in writing and mathematics. Test results in 2015 and 2016 had suggested that girls in key stage 1 and boys in key stage 2 were not making enough progress, including disadvantaged pupils. Your leadership team had already identified this as a key priority.
- On visiting classrooms, it became clear that a wide range of good teaching is now securing effective writing development across English and other subjects in the curriculum. My observations of pupils' writing books across the school showed clear improvements being made this year. The school's assessment information shows that significantly more pupils in Years 2 and 6 are attaining the expected standard for writing and over a quarter are reaching greater depth.
- Progress in writing is clear in pupils' books across year groups; pupils benefit from the actions taken to help them write expressively and with purpose. Equally, all pupils, including the youngest children, are benefiting from editing their work in order to improve the accuracy of their spelling and grammar.
- However, we agreed that some pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds, most notably from middle prior attaining starting points, do not receive consistently precise help in their writing tasks in Year 5. Their progress slows when they do not receive the continual challenge needed to help them make thorough use of their knowledge.
- As part of my line of enquiry into pupils' achievement in literacy, I also checked on their progress in phonics (letters and the sounds they represent). Test results for Year 1 in 2016 had suggested a decline in standards, particularly for boys. The school's accurate assessment information and observation of pupils' learning in phonics lessons show that effective teaching is now supporting a very large majority of pupils in Year 1 to attain the expected score for their age. Equally, older pupils in Years 2, 3 and 4 who did not achieve the expected standard in the past have been supported effectively to catch up.
- Observations of mathematics lessons demonstrated the positive difference that improvements to teaching have made to pupil achievement this year. The teaching of number and place value, tables, calculation and problem-solving is now securing good progress across most year groups in the school.
- Teachers make effective use of questioning in mathematics, and pupils are helped to think about how to approach their work, which deepens their understanding. They also help pupils to use mathematical aids and equipment to demonstrate and test their thinking. As a result, pupils are confidently applying their knowledge and skills to more difficult problems.
- Pupils' workbooks and assessment information for current Year 2 and Year 6 show that pupils in these year groups are making good progress from their

different starting points, including the most able. Many more pupils are working at the expected standard in mathematics and writing and over a fifth are working towards the higher standards in both subjects. However, we also agreed that the progress of pupils in Year 5 is not secure. This is because pupils are not challenged consistently effectively. As a consequence, some pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, do not make the progress they should from their different starting points.

- My second line of enquiry was concerned with the achievement of children in the early years. Published results in 2015 and 2016 were below national averages and indicated that children were underachieving. You have also identified that previous arrangements for the assessment of children when they joined early years were inaccurate, resulting in teaching and activities that did not help them make good progress and achieve a good start in key stage 1.
- In response to this underperformance, you have focused on ensuring high-quality leadership, brought greater accuracy to assessment, and appointed new and experienced staff to help lead improvements. Children are now making good progress from their starting points, including those from disadvantaged backgrounds. Your accurate assessment information demonstrates that an increasing proportion of children are reaching age-related expectations.
- My third line of enquiry was concerned with the accuracy of leaders' assessment of their work to improve the quality of education at the school. This stemmed from the past performance of pupils with lower and average starting points, including the disadvantaged, in national tests in 2015 and 2016, which indicated underachievement.
- Inspection evidence clearly demonstrates your accurate view of the school's performance and the difference your actions have made to the performance of pupils in writing, mathematics and the early years. However, we agreed that your evaluation of the additional help provided to some pupils who are at risk of falling behind, or who arrive at different points in the school year, lacks sharpness, and as a result, their progress slows down when leaders are not able to adjust teaching quickly enough in order to help them.
- My fourth line of enquiry looked at the school's use of the pupil premium grant in order to help pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds achieve well and reduce the differences between their progress and others nationally with similar starting points. This arose from past results which showed differences in early years, key stage 1 and key stage 2. You have recognised these differences and taken effective action to improve the quality of teaching, as well as providing well-focused support for those who are disadvantaged.
- The school's use of teaching assistants has been particularly effective in helping disadvantaged pupils receive the support they need in lessons. You have also helped to improve pupils' attendance and their full participation in school activities. As a consequence, disadvantaged pupils are now achieving well in most year groups, with the exception of Year 5. However, your assessment of the impact of the pupil premium funding, particularly in arts subjects, lacks the precision to ensure that it is making as much difference as possible to pupils' achievement.

- My final line of enquiry was about attendance. Published information from 2015 and 2016 shows that particular groups of pupils were persistently absent much more than is the case nationally, and these included those with disadvantaged backgrounds and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- Discussions with your leaders and scrutiny of records quickly demonstrated a significant improvement in attendance and punctuality for all groups. The school has strong and effective strategies in place to monitor and improve attendance. This is now making a real difference to the attendance of all pupils, including disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers plan work that sufficiently challenges pupils across all of key stage 2, in order to help them sustain their current good progress in mathematics and writing
- staff use assessment information more sharply to support pupils to make rapid progress, in particular disadvantaged pupils and those who need to catch up
- they evaluate the impact of pupil premium spending more precisely, so that leaders are assured of its effectiveness on disadvantaged pupils' outcomes and on the arts curriculum.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Hertfordshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

David Turner
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

- During this short inspection, I met with you, senior leaders and three members of the governing body, including the chair of governors.
- I also held a meeting with an adviser from the local authority and the school's national leader in education, who is the headteacher of the Mandeville School, which is part of the Spiral Partnership Educational Trust.
- I also met with seven members of staff to discuss their professional development and safeguarding training.
- I looked at pupils' work in books and spoke with pupils throughout the day, as well as holding a meeting with pupils from key stage 2.
- I reviewed school documentation, assessment information, policies and

information posted on the school website.

- I scrutinised a range of documentation about the school's safeguarding work, including the single central record.
- I took account of the 66 responses to Parent View, the online questionnaire, 60 text-free comments from parents, and nine responses to the online staff questionnaire. I also took account of four letters from parents and the views of parents whom I met at the start of the school day.